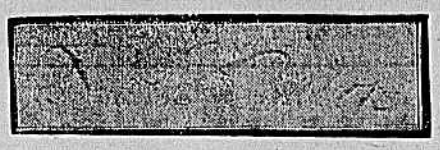

AUTOGRAPH OF NATHANIEL BACON.

worst are sent us, and we had few that we could boast of, since the persecution in Cromwell's tyranny drove divers worthy men hither. But, I thank God, there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years. For learning has brought disobedience and heresy, and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them, and libels against the best government. God keep us from both"!

The last clause of his report tells the story of his character, namely, that he did not believe in the education of the poor at the expense of the government, but that every man should educate his own children.

About 1670 there arrived in Virginia a man about twenty-four years of age. This was Nathaniel Bacon, Jr., the son of an English gentleman, Thomas Bacon, and probably a kinsman of Lord Francis Bacon, the English philosopher. Young Bacon was educated at Oxford University and had traveled extensively in Europe. As far as history narrates, he was well versed in English politics. Upon reaching manhood he married a daughter of Sir Edward Duke and thus incurred the anger of his father. He thereupon shipped for Virginia, where he soon took a prominent part in the affairs of the colony and became a leader among the younger men.

Everything was not quiet in Virginia when Bacon reached the colony. The planters complained bitterly concerning the navigation act of 1651, by which goods carried into England should be transported only in English ships. The trade which Virginia had with the Dutch was a profitable one, and the Virginians saw it die with bitterness in their hearts. A second navigation act was passed in the reign of Charles II. of the same kind, providing that no goods should either be shipped to or from England except in British built vessels. Neither could any of the products raised in the colony be shipped to any place but ports in England, Ireland or some other port under the British flag. This meant that whatever tobacco was raised in Virginia to supply the demands of European countries would have to go through English ports, and thus the Virginians were placed entirely in the hands of the English merchants, who bought at a low price and in return sold their goods at exorbitant rates. In vain did the settlers protest that this action was unbecoming and tyrannous, especially if the mother country did not pay all the expenses of her colonies at home. It was proposed by some of the planters that the crops of tobacco should be reduced, but of course this meant a reduction of the resources of the planters.

Added to the strong feeling that the Virginians thus had against the English government for restricting their trade, there came into existence a distrust of the royal Governor, Sir William Berkeley, especially about 1672, after he had kept one Assembly since 1661. Moreover, his autocratic nature bore hard upon the people who had imbibed a spirit of liberty, which necessarily existed in a new country. Some of the colonists also thought that Berkeley was somewhat responsible for the large grants of land that Charles II. so freely gave to favorites. Then another cause of discontent was the fact that the Governor was engaged privately in trade with the Indians, and consequently he was slow to take steps against the Indians on the frontier when they pillaged and stole the property of the planters.

The year 1675 pointed to serious trouble of some kind, according to the report of some Virginians who were superstitious, for in this year occurred three wonderful things. First of all, a large comet was seen every evening for a week, streaming like a horse's tail across the heavens. To the superstitious, a comet indicated war. This phenomenon was followed by great flights of pigeons in such flocks that the sky was darkened and the limbs of large trees were broken down at night when the pigeons went to roost. A third strange sight was a swarm of flies about an inch long and the size of a man's little finger, and had the letter "W" on their wings, which was interpreted to mean war. These flies, which were probably locusts, came out of the ground and ate all of the leaves from the trees.

But to return to the narrative: In 1675 some Indians dwelling in Stafford county, just across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg, stole some pigs of one of the settlers. One or two of the Indians were shot, and the Indians then retaliated by killing a herdsman. At once the county lieutenant called all of the force of Stafford, pursued the Indians and killed about eleven of them. Unfortunately, the Indians killed were not the guilty ones. War having broken out in Maryland against the Susquehannocks, a body of Virginia troops, under the command of Colonel John Washington, went to the assistance of their Maryland brethren. Some Indian envoys who were sent to negotiate with the whites were, against all the rules of war, put to death by the troops commanded by Major Thomas Truman, leader of the Marylanders. Almost immediately Virginia was filled with infuriated Susquehannocks, who began to pillage on the frontier from the head of tidewater on the Potomac to the falls of the James. In January, 1676, in a single day, thirty-six persons were murdered. When Berkeley was informed of this deed he said that nothing could be done until the Virginia Assembly met, in March of that year. At length, when March came, the "Long Assembly" was called. A force of five hundred troops were gathered, but Berkeley, without any explanation, disbanded the army, saying that the frontier forts, if properly equipped, would furnish all the protection that the inhabitants needed. Then it was that Nathaniel Bacon loomed up as a leader. He was said to be a free thinker, but a man who impressed the people, and he drew around him a wily Scotchman, William Drummond, who had been Governor of the Albemarle colony in Carolina, and Richard Lawrence, a graduate of Oxford, who was designated as "Thoughtful Mr. Lawrence." Both of these gentlemen were wealthy men for that day and generation, and are said to have had the best homes on Jamestown Island. Bacon himself lived on his plantation at Curl's Neck, about fifteen miles from Richmond. In discussing Berkeley's attitude towards the Indian troubles, we are told that Bacon exclaimed, "If the red skins meddle with me, damn my blood but I will harrow them, commission or no commission."

In 1676 some Indians attacked Bacon's plantation and killed his overseer and one of his servants. The planters from the neighborhood assembled. Bacon took the lead and sent a courier to Governor Berkeley to ask for a commission. Berkeley did not grant the commission, though Bacon interpreted his reply as favorable, and wrote him thanking him for his promised commission.

Hardly, however, had Bacon proceeded on his way with his armed force of over five hundred men before news reached them that the Governor had proclaimed all who continued with Bacon as rebels. Thereupon most of the planters returned home, but some fifty-seven continued in arms and with Bacon attacked the Indians near Richmond and defeated them in a bloody battle in which about one hundred and fifty Indians were slain. In the meantime Berkeley had gathered a force and had taken the field against the young Englishman who presumed to proceed without his sanction. But suddenly came news from across the York River that the people of Gloucester were in arms and ready to join with Bacon. Then the Governor, upon the advice of his Council, issued writs for the election of a new House of Burgesses to supersede the "Long Assembly" which had now existed for sixteen years. Bacon's friends rallied around him and elected him as a Burgess from Henrico county. If we can rely upon the reports of the time, in various parts of the colony many men voted though they were not qualified legally, not owning a freehold as required by the law that the previous Assembly had passed in 1670.

As the time for the meeting of the new House of Burgesses approached, Bacon journeyed towards Jamestown from his plantation at Curl's in his sail boat, accompanied by some thirty of his friends and adherents. On reaching Jamestown he was arrested by the high sheriff and taken at once to the capitol and carried into the presence of the stern and harsh Berkeley. The report is that the Governor said to him, rather mildly, "Mr. Bacon, have you forgotten to be a gentleman?" "No, may it please your honor," replied the young rebel. "Very well," said the Governor, "then I will take your parole." Doubtless this was a great surprise to Bacon, and the only conclusion that we can reach for the Governor's gentle treatment was his fear of the people, in view of the fact that a majority of the Burgesses returned from the different counties were not of his party, but belonged to the liberal element in the colony. Bacon went upon his release to the house of his friend, Richard Lawrence. After Bacon's parole the question arose what should be done. He was still a prisoner. His friends were in a state of consternation, and on all sides was heard among the Burgesses and the hundred inhabitants of Jamestown expressions doubtful as to the outcome. No one seemed to realize that there would be an outbreak, and his friends were saying, "All's over; Bacon is taken." It was generally understood that if Bacon would acknowledge his offense and beg the pardon of the Governor, his previous resistance to Governor Berkeley would be entirely overlooked.

In the Council there was another Nathaniel Bacon, Berkeley's friend and the "rebel's" cousin. By this relative Bacon was persuaded, against his will, to offer an apology to Governor Berkeley for having proceeded against the Indians without a commission. When the Assembly met, the Governor rose and said, "If there be joy in the presence of angels